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Monday, December 20, 2004

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SOUTH JERSEY

Corzine lauds grant for Camco's new radios

Saturday, December 18, 2004

'Down payment' on \$30M system

 By JASON NARK
 Courier-Post Staff
 LINDENWOLD

With the threat of terrorist attacks always a reality, state and local officials said fixing Camden County's communications system is critical for public safety.

Sen. Jon Corzine, D-Hoboken, announced a \$1 million federal grant from the Departments of Commerce, Justice and State for a new system while taking a tour of the county's communications center in Lindenwold Friday afternoon.

Corzine said the money would be a "down payment" on the estimated \$30 million to \$45 million system needed to overhaul to the county's 30-year-old fire and EMS radio system as well as a 15-year-old system used by police.

A new system, one that allows all emergency personnel to speak to one another, could be critical in the event of a terrorist attack.

"It could literally mean the difference between life and death in an emergency," Corzine said.

In October, county officials unveiled a \$343,921 upgrade that would equip about 950 police vehicles with VHF radios to use as backups to the county's primary UHF system, which sometimes experiences significant interference from a digital-television signal near Boston.

A \$50,000 patching system announced in January linked the emergency communications system in Lindenwold with two of the county's largest departments - Camden and Cherry Hill. Before that, an officer in Collingswood could have no direct radio contact with a Camden officer.

Camden County Freeholder Lou Cappelli said the grant will help lay the foundation for the system, and help prepare for the ultimate goal of obtaining several 700 and 800 mhz frequencies when the Federal Communications Commission begins clearing signals for public use on Dec. 31, 2007.

The system could be completed within five to seven years, Cappelli said.

In the meantime, the county will erect four new radio towers and continue to apply for more grants.

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"We're going to be ready to go," said Cappelli. "This is a step forward."

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